

Fruitless Attempts?

The Kurdish Initiative and Containment of the Kurdish Movement in Turkey

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Abstract

Following the victory of the Kurdish party DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, Democratic Society Party) in Turkey's southeastern provinces in the local elections of March 2009, Turkey witnessed the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) government's Kurdish initiative, the closure of the victorious Kurdish party, and waves of arrests of Kurdish activists and politicians. This rush of action constituted a renewed effort to contain and roll back the political and societal influence of the Kurdish movement. But what is it exactly that the government and the state were attempting to contain, and why? This article considers the recent moves of the ruling AKP, the judiciary, and the Turkish Armed Forces in regard to the "Kurdish problem" in Turkey's Southeast, interpreting them as different responses to the regional success of the Kurdish movement.

Introduction

The Kurdish question is one of the most long-standing issues in Turkey's politics. In the early 2000s, with the Turkey-EU accession negotiations ahead, the ceasefire of the PKK (*Partiya*

Karkerên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Workers' Party), and the coming to power of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party), a range of political reforms were introduced, which allowed a more peaceful atmosphere to prevail in the Kurdish-inhabited provinces of Turkey's Southeast. These developments, as well as the Kurdish party's success in the municipal elections in the region, allowed for a re-orientation in the political organization of the Kurdish movement over the past decade. Indeed, while no longer in control of the region by means of arms, the Kurdish movement, with the PKK being the principal actor, has reinforced its presence. This article discusses these new realities through the prism of the developments following the elections of March 2009. These developments, so we will argue, testify to different attempts of government and state institutions to contain and roll back this political and societal influence of the PKK in the southeastern, predominantly Kurdish-inhabited provinces. We will argue that, alarmed by the election outcome, the ruling party (AKP) and state officials responded in two ways. The first was to launch the Kurdish initiative, challenging the PKK and its affiliated organizations as well as the DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, Democratic Society Party) both politically and ideologically; the second was the upsurge in judicial investigations and arrests of activists deemed to be PKK members, in order to crack down on its urban wings. The elections and government-initiated constitutional reforms, as well as the waves of arrest will be discussed in the context of the ways of dealing with the Kurdish issue.

Towards the end of its second term in power, the AKP embarked on a major new round of constitutional changes seemingly aimed at a reform of the Turkish political system in 2010. This effort, however, did not win the backing of the main Kurdish party, the BDP (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, Peace and Democracy Party), even though the changes had been prompted, at least in part, by the controversial court ban on the BDP's predecessor, the DTP, earlier that year. This ruling appeared to undermine an attempt of the government to deal with

the Kurdish problem; yet, a key element of the government's proposed reforms, an amendment to limit the ability of the courts to ban political parties, was rejected in parliament.¹ Secularists rejected constitutional reforms, considering them an attack on the judiciary, one of the bastions of Turkish nationalist secular republicanism (Kemalism), and believed that the executive (the AKP government) was seeking to gain control over the courts as part of its unstated ("hidden") agenda of Islamification.² This struggle for the state and the balance of power between its different institutions was of less relevance to the BDP, which rejected the proposed changes because it conceived of them as lacking concessions and changes to its aims.

The recent moves from Ankara in respect to the Southeast have been played out against the background of the central power-play in Turkey today. The ongoing battle between the defenders of Kemalist and Islamist ideas has been expressed in the struggle for a definition of the state's Kurdish policy: the established hard-line approach of judiciary repression and security clampdown versus a new attempt at political reform from the AKP government. Both, however, should be placed within the context of the contemporary entry of the Kurdish movement into political society. It is the breakthrough of electoral success and the attempts by the legal BDP and the outlawed PKK—historically the leading organization of the Kurdish movement—to develop structures for self-government at local and regional levels that have defined state and government responses.

Thus, while recent developments related to Turkey's Kurdish issue can be represented as a bivalent political play of regional (Kurdish) versus state (Turkish) interests, they can also be placed in a triangular nexus of relations between three sets of actors: those of the traditional statist institutions (primarily the Turkish Armed Forces and judiciary, ideologically

¹ It failed by one vote to get the majority necessary for constitutional change.

² For an analysis of the planned changes and reactions to them, see Aslı Ü. Bali, 'Unpacking Turkey's "Court-Packing" Referendum,' in *Middle East Report Online*, November 5, 2010.

represented as “Kemalists”), the AKP government (and more widely the parliamentary party, the party as a whole and the “Islamist” movement that it represents), and the “pro-Kurdish” organizations (including the PKK and the legal BDP, referred to as “the Kurdish movement”).³ In other words, state forces, differently represented by Kemalists and by government institutions, have used alternative approaches for different reasons in seeking to deny the growing power of the Kurdish movement. This attempt, which is still ongoing, reached a climax during the period between 2009 and 2010.

A brief listing of key events that form the backdrop to this paper can be taken from the nation-wide municipal elections on 29 March 2009, in which the DTP won the Southeast back from the AKP (earlier Kurdish electoral progress in the region from the mid-1990s had been reversed during the first half of the 2000s, with the AKP’s ascendancy). Then, in April 2009, some fifty persons (mainly DTP officials, including three vice-presidents of the party) were detained during a wave of police operations all over the Southeast (and also in Ankara and Istanbul).⁴ Next, in May 2009, President Abdullah Gül made a public statement, naming the Kurdish issue as the most pressing problem in the country, followed by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan’s announcement of a new initiative, a “Kurdish opening” (*Kürt açılımı*). In mid-August 2009, Erdoğan made an emotional appeal for all parties to unite behind a solution

³ These are simplifying characterizations, of course, and not necessarily of particularly discrete or well-defined entities. All three sets of actors include in their ranks a range of groups and individuals with quite widely diverging perspectives and motivations, analysis of which is not attempted here. Briefly, the AKP might be characterized as including elements sympathetic to both Turkish nationalism and Kurdish aspirations under its umbrella of economic neo-liberalism and social conservatism more or less closely wedded to Islamist values, or “political Islam”; Kemalists range from ultra-nationalists to socialist-oriented supporters of democracy within the secular system, as embodied in the unitary Turkish state; and the Kurdish movement is home to militants, democrats, communists, and liberals desiring reforms that span from basic human rights to radical political autonomy.

⁴ It has been claimed that the arrests were actually put off until after the voting, for fear that the operation would otherwise appear as an attempt to alter the course of the elections (Ihsan Bal, ‘The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP.’ *USAK articles-analyses (online)*, May 7, 2009, <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=964>).

to the Kurdish question, rhetorically asking parliamentarians: “If Turkey had not spent its energy, budget, peace and young people on [fighting] terrorism, if Turkey had not spent the last 25 years in conflict, where would we be today?”⁵

This AKP attempt to deal with the Kurdish issue faced harsh criticism from opposition parties, especially in August 2009, after deadly attacks of the PKK, and at the end of October, with the return of PKK fighters and families that appeared to the Turkish mainstream as stage-managed by the DTP as a PKK-victory parade.⁶ Thus, in the fall of 2009 the AKP retreated. The PKK return initiative was quickly halted, and the Kurdish opening rephrased as a project of national unity, subsumed under a wider “democratic” initiative aimed to include recognition of (some) other minorities and minority rights within the traditionally non-pluralist Turkish state system (and extended also to a normalization and improvement of relations with the country’s eastern neighbors). Nevertheless, the government had made it clear that it was searching for a new way of defining the Kurdish issue.⁷

However, even as it attempted to initiate this break with traditional statist ideology—and in the midst of apparent competition, rather than cooperation with the Kurdish movement—the AKP was unable to control the official narrative. Government ministers instead found themselves having to respond to new moves from the security forces and

⁵ ‘Erdoğan makes emotional appeal for unity on Kurdish initiative’, *Today’s Zaman*, August 12, 2009.

⁶ A total of 34 persons, of which eight were PKK guerrillas from the Qandil mountains and 26 from the Mahmur refugee camp in Northern Iraq, entered Turkey as a “peace group” at the border town of Silopi. The group members were welcomed by several ten thousand enthusiastic Kurds making victory signs in a welcoming ceremony organized by the Kurdish legal party DTP. Mayors and parliamentarians from DTP attended the ceremony.

⁷ Yeğen distinguishes three major periods in the state’s preception of the Kurdish issue: pre-denial, denial, and post-denial. He argues that the AKP government is searching for a new approach and “the year 2009 has opened with some major steps toward the politics of recognition”, however “though some important steps have been taken on the road to recognition, the Turkish state is, at best, begrudgingly on this road”, quoted from Mesut Yeğen, ‘The Kurdish Question in Turkey’, in: Casier, M. and Jongerden, J., *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*. 2011, New York: Routledge, 79-80)

judiciary. On 11 December 2009, the Constitutional Court banned the DTP (a rather sudden, not to say timely conclusion to a long-standing case), and on 24 December, the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office began another operation, which resulted in the arrest of some eighty persons, mainly party officials and representatives of the newly-formed BDP, including nine present or former Kurdish party mayors.⁸ A few weeks later, in mid-February 2010, came yet another round of arrests, with dozens of (now) BDP executive members taken into custody. According to the indictments, the detainees of the April, December, and February operations were all members of the Turkey Council of the KCK (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan*, Kurdish Communities Union), an organization linked to the PKK. The people arrested were thought to be running municipalities under the direction of the PKK.⁹

The main thesis of this article is that these developments testify to different attempts to contain and roll back the political and societal influence of the Kurdish movement led by the PKK. With mounting concerns finally triggered by the 2009 election outcome, the ruling party and state officials responded with (1) the legal-security attempt to muzzle the Kurdish movement at the organizational level, by banning the political party and through the upsurge in judicial investigations into and arrests of activists deemed to be (surrogate) PKK members, in order to crack down on its urban wings (in combination with continuing military pressure on the PKK based in Iraqi Kurdish territory); and (2) the government's launch of the Kurdish initiative, challenging the Kurdish movement both politically and ideologically (and attempting to restructure the relationship of the Turkish state to the Southeast and its Kurdish issue).

⁸ This included the mayors of Batman, Siirt, Cizre, Diyarbakır-Kayapınar, Diyarbakır-Sur, Çınar, Viranşehir, and Kızıltepe, and the former mayor of Diğle.

⁹ On 18 June 2010, Diyarbakır prosecutors would ultimately charge 151 Kurdish politicians and activists from the Southeast with aiding the PKK (Aliza Marcus, 'Troubles in Turkey's Backyard', *Foreign Policy*, July 12, 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/09/troubles_in_turkey_s_backyard).

This paper will discuss the responses and some of the effects that they have generated, as well as consider future prospects for the Kurdish issue in Turkey. First, however, attention will be devoted to understanding the events following the March 2009 local elections, and what it exactly is that the different responses intended to confront. To this end, we begin by elaborating on these elections, which were key to the current developments. Then we lay out some of the main characteristics of the political institutionalization of the PKK in the Southeast of Turkey, and the role of the KCK. Following that, we discuss the AKP government's responses to this ongoing institutionalization process and turn to the ways in which this has been received by the PKK, the DTP/BDP, and their followers, before concluding with a consideration of future prospects.

The 2009 Local Elections and the Kurds

The March 2009 local elections resulted in a clear victory for the DTP. This is important to emphasize, because its significance can easily be missed. The DTP's success is not easily detected unless one looks closely: country-wide, the party was essentially static, stuck at an unimpressive five to six percent of the national vote.¹⁰ In order to observe the DTP's success attention needs to be directed to the DTP's performance itself, because this is what defines Turkey's Kurdish region today—and would, indeed, serve as the most likely roadmap for any future regional devolution of power, a common aspiration among the Kurdish movement.

Building on its success in the 2007 national election, when it was able to send 21 MPs to parliament,¹¹ the DTP achieved an enormous increase in its control of local governments in

¹⁰ According to Bal, "Kurds in Turkey number approximately 15 million, and 25% of this population voted for the DTP. That is to say, most of the votes of the Kurdish population went to the AKP and to the other parties" (Ihsan Bal, 'The Kurdish Issue: Today and Its Future. The Democratic Initiative and the DTP's Capacity to Use This Channel,' *USAK articles-analyses (online)*, January 11, 2010).

¹¹ These MPs were elected as independents, in order to circumvent the much criticized 10-percent electoral threshold in Turkey.

2009 as compared to the previous local elections in 2004. In terms of total (city and district) mayorships, for example, it made a relative gain of over 60 percent, nearly doubling its 2004 vote in several provinces,¹² and winning back support that had previously gone over to the AKP. Diyarbakır, the only metropolitan city in the southeastern region, had been publicly targeted by the AKP during the election campaign, with Prime Minister Erdoğan vowing to take the city and the DTP mayor responding by claiming that it was their “fortress.” In the end, Diyarbakır not only stayed with the DTP, but did emphatically so.

And yet, crucial as it was, the election in Diyarbakır was little different from others in the area. Basically, third parties were squeezed out of the track in a two-horse race. Rival claims were made by the two principal protagonists in what became a referendum to determine who represented the people’s “real” interests, with the AKP stressing practical economics and conservative (Islamic) values, and the DTP emphasizing a regionally politicized ethno-nationalist (Kurdish) identity. And it was the DTP which won the popular vote across nearly the whole of Turkey’s southeastern corner. Equally noteworthy, therefore, is the depth as well as breadth of DTP support in the provincial assemblies (*İl Genel Meclisleri*) vote: in very high turnouts (70-85 percent), the DTP polled almost half of all votes cast in the ten provinces that it won, ending up with four of the top five percentage votes in the entire country.¹³

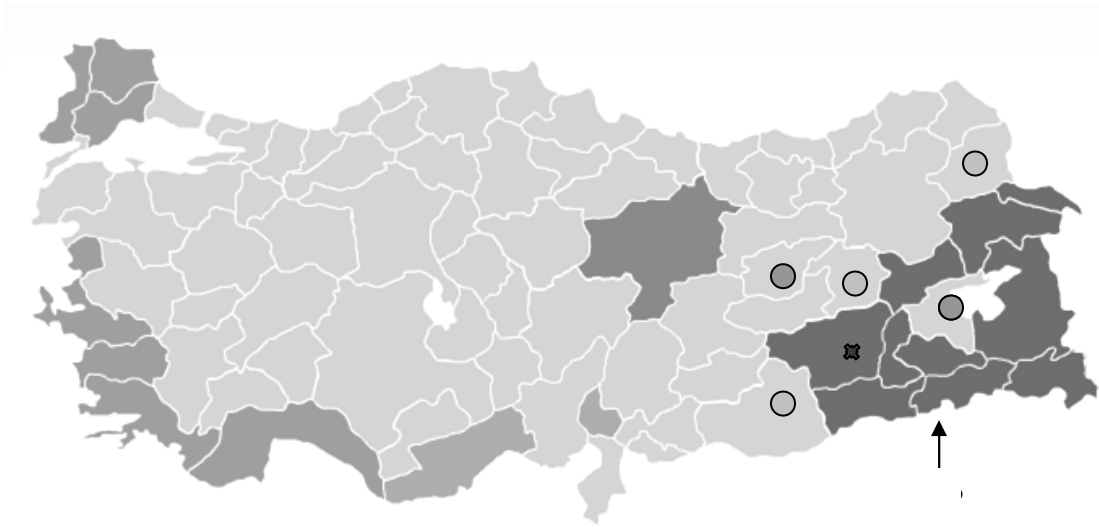
The Kurdish area in Turkey: Provincial authorities after the 2009 local election results¹⁴

¹² These were the provinces of Bingöl, Ağrı, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Mardin, Muş, Şırnak, and Van.

¹³ In Hakkari, the DTP achieved the highest share of the popular vote (74%) for any party in any province in Turkey, in Şırnak the second highest, Diyarbakır 3rd, and Batman 5th (NTV, ‘*Seçim 2009*’, <http://secim2009.ntvmsnbc.com/default.htm>)

¹⁴ NTV (2009) [with wikimedia] & Çarkoğlu, using TÜİK figures (Turkish Statistical Institute, ‘Local government elections,’ <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/yerel.zul>), and Ali Çarkoğlu, ‘Turkey’s Local Elections of 2009: Winners and Losers’, *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 1-18.

Map: Turkey, showing the region of DTP-majority provincial authorities*



* Circles indicate AKP provinces with DTP at 15-30%.

✳️Diyarbakır

(Light shaded provinces, AKP; other darker shaded provinces, CHP, MHP, and BBP)

Table: Percentage vote by province (including change of vote share from 2004 and margin of victory) *

PROVINCE	DTP		AKP		Victory Margin***
	Vote	Change**	Vote	Change	
Hakkari	74	+28	21	-12	54
Şırnak	61	+23	31	+6	30
Diyarbakır	59	+16	32	-1	28
Batman	53	+3	35	+18	18
Van	48	+22	34	-6	14
Mardin	44	+17	27	+4	17
Muş	43	+13	29	-3	14
Ağrı	37	not given	29	-6	8
Siirt	37	+11	35	-3	2
Iğdır	32	not given	23	-1	10
TOTAL****	48%	(+17)	29%	- 1	19%
Bitlis	27	+12	32	+3	5
Tunceli	20	+2	27	+10	7
Kars	18	not given	37	-2	19
Şanlıurfa	20	not given	40	0	20
Bingöl	21*****	0	43	0	22

* Selection criteria: provinces in which the DTP recorded >15% of the vote.

** DTP figures calculated on proviso that it entered the 2004 as the major partner of a six-party coalition.

*** Some victory margin figures appear inconsistent as an effect of rounding up or down.

**** Averages for DTP-won provinces.

***** In Bingöl, the DTP came in third fractionally (0.1%) behind the Islamic Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*).

Placing this within the national context, Ali Çarkoğlu noted that “the DTP emerged as the most successful party in attracting [...] votes at the expense of the AKP at the provincial level.” He suggests that in the first electoral setback for the AKP, after a decade of ever-increasing success at the polls, it was the gains of the Kurdish movement that were of more immediate concern than those of the principal national opposition, the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republican People’s Party). Significantly, Çarkoğlu analyzes the dynamic in the Southeast thus: “The reason for the declining support of the AKP was most likely the ethnic identity issues [...] The military operations that followed the AKP’s electoral success in the

region in the July 2007 elections [incursions into Iraq, mostly against the PKK mountain bases] appear to have tilted the electoral balance in favor of the DTP.”¹⁵ In other words, it would seem that, when people were forced to choose between the AKP and the PKK, they went for the latter, expressed at the ballot box through support for the DTP.

Local Institutionalization of the Kurdish Movement

Large parts of the Southeast have been under the ideological influence of the PKK since the end of the 1980s—and for part of that time it was even controlled by its guerillas.¹⁶ Participation in the political process since 1990 has provided the Kurdish movement with a legitimate structure and recognized basis for public gathering, legal protection from prosecution, new access to domestic and international audiences, and new means to engage in symbolic politics (such as the Kurdification of place names, and the establishment of Kurdish cultural centers).¹⁷ Yet, it was only following the municipal elections of April 1999, when HADEP (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, People’s Democracy Party) won six provinces in the region and obtained 37 mayor seats, that the movement became politically institutionalized at the local level. This process of institutionalization has contained two aspects: on the one hand, the process of developing legal political organizations expressing Kurdish demands and interests; on the other hand, the development of these demands into parts of the (local) state

¹⁵ Çarkoğlu (2009).

¹⁶ Ismet Imset, *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (1973-1992)* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992); David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds. An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2007).

¹⁷ Nicole F. Watts, ‘Activists in Office’.

apparatus. Although ethnic Kurds had long been represented in Turkey's political system, it was only now that they were able to assert Kurdish claims.¹⁸

From 1990 to present, successive Kurdish political parties close to the PKK (the HEP, DEP, HADEP, DEHAP, DTP, and now the BDP, each founded as its predecessor was closed by the state) have steadily increased their power and confidence. The formation of the HEP (*Halkın Emek Partisi*, People's Work Party) in 1990 and the election of its candidates in October 1991 provided the Kurdish movement with an institutional basis for collective and public gathering that it had lacked, allowing it to open offices in cities and towns around the country, and thus enabling it to rally increasing numbers of Kurdish supporters.¹⁹ With the DEP (*Demokrasi Partisi*, Democracy Party) in 1993, the HADEP (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, People's Democracy Party) in 1994, and the DEHAP (*Demokratik Halk Partisi*, Democratic People's Party) in 1997, it gained recognition and support in the European Union in the context of human rights, as well as establishing itself in local elective bodies and gaining some success nationally. With the DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, Democratic Society Party, established in 2005), it managed to become the third party in the national parliament in the 2007 election, before going on to re-establish itself as the primary party in the region in 2009 (a position recently confirmed by the referendum on the proposed constitutional changes, in which the BDP's call for a boycott was widely followed, and also reported, publicly confirming what had previously been little observed in the mass media).²⁰

¹⁸ This had previously not been realized due to a combination of tactical accommodation, coerced pragmatics, and a lack of perceived relevance of Kurdish identity in the political sphere. Nicole Watts, 'Activists in Office', *Ethnopolitics*, 5 (2) (2006): 133.

¹⁹ Nicole F. Watts, 'Activists in Office', p. 134.

²⁰ The average turnout for the 2010 referendum was around 75 percent across the nation's 71 non-Kurdish-dominated provinces, but only 40 percent in the Kurdish Southeast (based on the Prime Ministry's YSK figures, at <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/ReferandumSecimSonucServ?bilmece1=zgyf2j>).

This growing strength of legitimate, albeit continuously de-legitimized, political power was reinforced with the local development of a Kurdish civil society, both inspiration as well as human resources from the PKK. In the municipalities, strong relationships and cooperation have been fostered in recent years between the party officials, their administrations, and the DTP/BDP-friendly NGOs and local entrepreneurs, giving shape to tight knots of local power-sharing through which relationships with the Kurdish constituencies have been developed.²¹

Even though the municipalities have suffered from bureaucratic obstacles imposed upon them by the central state institutions since the beginning and had far more difficulty in attracting certain types of subsidies and investment than municipalities under the ruling AKP, they have nevertheless managed to develop what Watts terms local political “micro-climates.”²² According to Watts, these micro-climates are characterized by (1) a blurring of the relationship between state and non-state actors (between the municipalities and the local professional associations, unions, NGOs, and so on), and (2) the changing nature of social resistance, which is becoming increasingly institutionalized through the municipality-steered activities. The localized socio-political networks of cooperation reinforce the power of the municipalities and the Kurdish movement more generally, as they enable—through the provision of various social services and an engagement with a diverse repertoire of symbolic

²¹ Marlies Casier, ‘Contesting the ‘Truth’ of Turkey’s Human Rights Situation: State-Associations interactions in and outside the Southeast’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10, 2009. URL: <http://ejts.revues.org/index4190.html>

²² Nicole F. Watts, ‘Re-considering State-Society Dynamics in Turkey’s Kurdish Southeast’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4196.html> and Nicole F. Watts, ‘The Missing Moderate: Legitimacy Resources and pro-Kurdish Party Politics in Turkey’, in *The Kurdish Policy Imperative*, ed. Richard Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (London: Chatham House, 2010).

politics—a reaching out to the local constituents and development of ties of reciprocated loyalty.²³

These regional developments over the last decade did not go unnoticed by the state officials or the current governing party. Already at the very beginning of the Kurdish movement's re-orientation towards a primarily political struggle in the early 2000s, the Turkish establishment and the Turkish Armed Forces had exhibited great concern about what was observed as “revival and restructuring of the separatist movement through political means.”²⁴ The governing AKP, meanwhile, seeking to increase its votes among the Kurds in the southeastern and eastern parts of the country, had been developing equally exclusive networks of cooperation with the local civil society actors in the municipalities under its own ruling (and over a similar time span). The AKP's organizational network, of course, was able to enjoy state patronage, unlike that of the DTP which, engaged in contentious politics,²⁵ was instead subject to state pressure. Over the course of the decade, the Turkish judiciary launched literally hundreds of investigations into the activities and speeches of the local Kurdish actors.²⁶ Notwithstanding the constructive local political work of the AKP, however, along with the administrative and economic hindrance from Ankara and the downright destructive

²³ Nicole F. Watts, ‘Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey’, *Ethnopolitics*, 5 (2006): 125-144.; Şebnem Aslan, ‘Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4142.html>; Joost Jongerden, ‘Crafting Space, Making People: The Spatial Design of Nation in Modern Turkey’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4014.html>; Clemence Scalbert-Yücel, ‘The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project’, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4055.html>

²⁴ As quoted from the Chief of Staff's General Secretary' report “Evaluation of Internal Security Operations in 2000,” cited in Ersel Aydınli, ‘Decoding Turkey's Struggle with the PKK’, *Security Dialogue*, 33 (2002): 215.

²⁵ The term “contentious politics” (Tilly, 2003) refers to representative contention, given that the relationship between the state and the office-holders is characterized as adversarial, with the office-holder remaining under threat while challenging the “rules of the game,” as convincingly demonstrated in the case of the DTP by Nicole F. Watts, ‘Activists in Office’.

²⁶ Watts, ‘The Missing Moderate’

force of the state's legal-security apparatus, the Kurdish party was overwhelmingly vindicated by the electorate in 2009. The succession of recent events listed above unfolded in such a context.

The government's stuttering Kurdish initiative, along with the arrests made and the party closure enacted during its development, together with the entire history of judiciary investigations and arrests, thus needs to be understood in the light of the regional developments described. The legitimate development of Kurdish power is considered a threat to the central state and its control over the Kurdish region. Ultimately, this becomes a struggle over sovereignty. The crack-down on the KCK—and this is supported by the government, at least judging by the pronouncements of its leaders²⁷—was carried out in order to obstruct the continued socio-political institutionalization of the Kurdish movement in Turkey's Southeast.

The Role of the KCK

When the PKK was established as a political party in 1978, it had the classical organizational structure of communist parties, with a General Secretary as the leading party official and an Executive Committee responsible for direct operations. Today, the organization has grown into a complex of parties and organizations, with the PKK as the ideological center. Founded in 2005 as the KKK (*Koma Komalen Kurdistan*), the KCK can be regarded as a political project, one that builds, to paraphrase Öcalan, "on the self-government of local communities and is organized in the form of open councils, town councils, local parliaments and larger

²⁷ For instance, meeting with criticism during a visit to Batman in February 2011, on the day before the nineteenth hearing of the ongoing KCK case (being held in nearby Diyarbakır), Prime Minister Erdoğan responded with the statement that those guilty of constitutional crimes should be punished ("eğer anayasal suç işlenmişse cezası çekilir"). Reported at <http://www.gunlukgazetesi.net/?haberID=6261&haberBaslik=Ovada>.

congresses.”²⁸ As an organization within the PKK complex, the KCK is formally headed by Murat Karayılan, with decision-making councils composed of representatives from the different parts of the Kurdistan region (spread over Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran) and the Kurdish Diaspora in Western Europe.²⁹ The persons arrested in spring and winter of 2009 were accused of membership of the Turkey Council of the KCK.

The KCK in Turkey is active in several spheres of public life. It has a legal committee, which is involved in the establishment of local councils (at village, quarter, and city level), “people’s courts,” a committee for civil society organizations that implements projects to activate civil society, and a language and education committee responsible for implementing projects to develop the usage of Kurdish as a written language. An important concept in the KCK is that of the “free citizen” (*özgür yurttaş*). The free citizen concept includes basic civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech and organization, but also freedom of ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, and the freedom to develop a cultural and national identity.³⁰ Taking the concept of free citizen as a starting point, the KCK is considered to be the architect of the free municipality model (*özgür belediyeçilik modeli*), adopted by the DTP at a three-day conference in February 2008; it aims to realize a bottom-up participative administrative body, from local to provincial levels.³¹ The KCK and the free municipality model are both to be understood in terms of the “democratic triangle” concept developed by Öcalan. Outlined from his island jail through his lawyers,³² this democratic triangle is

²⁸ Ahmet Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, “The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through breaks?” in *Nationalisms and politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*, edited by Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, 143-162. New York: Routledge., 2011.

²⁹ *Koma Komalen Kurdistan Sözlüşmesi, ‘Kongre Belgeleri Dizisi IV (Congress Papers Series IV)’*, Wesanen Serxwebun (Serxwebun Publishers, 2005).

³⁰ *Koma Komalen Kurdistan Sözlüşmesi*, op.cit.

³¹ ‘DTP’de hedef 100 belediye. <http://www.aktuelbakis.com/Politika/6656.html>

³² Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1998 and sentenced to death in 1999. This sentence was turned into life-long imprisonment following EU-induced reforms in Turkey, which required the abolition of the death penalty.

intended to function as a “strategic dispositive,” as institutional and ideological capability—that is, to orient and organize Kurdish political demands (and thereby resolve the problem in Turkey’s Southeast). According to this ideology, the democratic triangle should be composed of three interrelated projects: the democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and democratic confederalism.³³

The project for a democratic republic aims at the establishment of a new, reformed republic with equal rights for all citizens. It is in the context of this project that the drafting of a new constitution became a tangible political demand on the part of the Kurdish movement. In the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, citizenship has been equated with Turkishness,³⁴ historically making Kurds invisible.³⁵ A new constitution, it follows, has to define citizenship in civil terms. While the project of the democratic republic centers on individual rights, the project of democratic autonomy focuses on the collective rights of the population. Both cultural and religious rights are conceived of as forms of such collective rights. Finally, democratic confederalism is a project for local self-organization. Referring among others to Murray Bookchin, this democratic confederalism is described as an alternative project of democratization, one which is to be organized bottom-up, from the local level.³⁶ It was this “democratic triangle” project which implied that political and ideological

Currently, the PKK-leader lives on the prison-island of Imralı in the Sea of Marmara. He communicates through his lawyers who are allowed to visit him on a weekly basis.

³³ Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, ‘The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through breaks?’, in *Nationalisms and politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*, ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

³⁴ Article 66 of the Turkish Constitution. For a discussion see Baskın Oran and Ibrahim Kaboğlu’s minority report (see below).

³⁵ Henry Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question* (Lanham/Oxford: Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 1998): 10-11. Even now the number of Kurds in Turkey is disputed, primarily because the state still does not gather official statistics according to ethnicity (e.g., through the regular national census).

³⁶ Mustafa Karasu, *Radikal Demokrasi* (Wesanen Mezopotamya Neuss, 2009).

struggles be given priority over armed conflict, developments confirmed in 2009 through one of the main PKK militant-activist magazines *Serxwebun*.

Fuelled, among other things, by Turkey's desire to become a member of the European Union and the reform requirements attendant upon this, public discussion about individual and collective rights has flourished during the past decade. The drafting of a new constitution had become a vigorously debated issue, and the issue of cultural rights was to be a cornerstone of the government's Kurdish opening, to which we will turn in the following sections. For the PKK, however, it is democratic confederalism that has been the key project, envisaging, as it does, not only a grand program for a societal configuration beyond the nation-state, but also a clear project for local organization. The recent waves of arrests were thus also aimed at preventing further implementation of these kinds of concepts and projects, by taking down the KCK.

Some analysts and sections of the press have made a direct link between the KCK arrests in April and December 2009 and the success of the DTP in the local elections earlier that year, indicating that the KCK is responsible for the latter by instilling fear in the population and/or oppressing the DTP into merely fulfilling its instructions.³⁷ Aside from overestimating the extent of (malevolent) KCK power over the electorate (as a corollary of underplaying the high level of genuine support for the Kurdish cause among Kurds in the region), this kind of analysis tends to underestimate the independent organizational dynamics of the DTP/BDP, assuming an overly high level of control over the party on the part of the KCK. The contribution of the KCK to the development and success of the DTP is not to be disregarded, as indicated; the main (PKK-linked) Kurdish political party in Turkey had been gaining significant success before the development of the KCK, and certainly the intended

³⁷ For example, the independent but state-oriented and politically well-connected Ankara think-tank International Strategic Research Organization (*Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu*, USAK), and the government-friendly *Zaman* and *Taraf* newspapers.

damage done to the KCK by the waves of arrests seems to have had little immediate impact on the BDP polling booth performance, judging from the referendum outcome in 2010 (in which the BDP consolidated its electoral support).

A more refined approach would enable us to observe the distinction between legal and illegal Kurdish parties, but without separating them from each other. We argue that the KCK has been instrumental in the regional development of DTP/BDP strategy, and that organizationally they are overlapping entities. This means that it is difficult to make the simple differentiation necessary in order to ascribe electoral success to one as opposed to the other.

The Government Response: The Kurdish Opening

Some analysts consider the AKP's democratic initiative as dating back a decade and tied to Turkey's accession process to the EU, which is reasonable, but little ingenuous.³⁸ It can also be argued that what actually happened, as explained above, was that the government embarked on its Kurdish opening only *after* the DTP's local election success, but then drew back and instead diluted it into a "democratic" opening. The current Kurdish initiative, therefore, looks more like an *ad hoc* process of politicking than a considered culmination of years of preparation. The best AKP revisionist apology was the initiative going back to a few comments made by Erdoğan in support of the Kurdish cause in Diyarbakır, in 2005. But the very fact that these were not followed up until two years later—that is, until after the DTP's victory—rather disproves that argument.

What the Kurdish initiative was intended to achieve exactly remains unclear, leading to discussions over whether there actually was a clear package or plan.³⁹ Thus, it still remains

³⁸ See, for example, Bal, 'The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP'.

³⁹ For arguments against the existence of a plan, see Marlies Casier, Andy Hilton and Joost Jongerden, 'Road Maps' and Roadblocks in Turkey's Southeast', *Middle East Report Online*, October 30, 2009, August 20, 2010).

far from apparent whether the government even has any explicit strategy at all, or where the Kurdish opening as announced fits into its policy. This fudging, in fact, gives support to the Kurdish nationalist claim that they determine the political discourse, with the AKP primarily reacting to them—which would be no shame in a genuinely pluralistic democracy able to embrace an internal ethno-nationalist cause, but it is not something that the AKP has appeared very willing or able to accept. In order to understand the government initiative without the luxury of a clear-cut policy document, therefore, we need to draw inferences and generalize from the process as it has emerged.

In terms of substance, what seems apparent is that measures were to be promoted towards (1) ending outstanding restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language (such as the lack of Kurdish Studies departments at universities), without allowing for it to achieve the status of a second official language (thus making it unacceptable as a medium for education at primary or secondary schools); (2) the “surrender” (return) of PKK fighters, who might be prosecuted or not; and (3) a revival of economic investment in the region through the longstanding GAP project,⁴⁰ however without any review of the historical efficacy of this approach (or consideration of similarly scaled alternatives). In terms of style or method, there was an initially fertile period of consultation, in which government ministers met with several

<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero103009.html>; for a different argument, see Cengiz Çandar, ‘The Kurdish Question: The Reasons and Fortunes of the ‘Opening’’, *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 13-19, who suggests that there is a plan nevertheless.

⁴⁰ Launched with the construction of the Keban Dam in 1975, GAP is now a multi-sector and integrated regional development effort. Spread over nine provinces in the Southeast of Turkey (Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Antep, Kilis, Siirt, Urfa, Mardin, and Şırnak), it envisages the construction of 22 dams, 19 power plants and hundreds of kilometers of irrigation canals. In quantitative spatial terms, the GAP region has a surface area of more than 75,000 km², corresponding to almost 10 percent of the total surface of Turkey. The 1.7 million hectares of arable land served by the project is about 20 percent of the total irrigable land in the country, and the population in the region is about 7 million people, approximately 10 percent of the total population of the Republic of Turkey. Starting as an infrastructural project, it has been transformed into a development project for the Southeast (Özok 2004, Jongerden 2010).

business, professional, human rights, and other organizations from the region (generally outside the Kurdish movement); however, these efforts dried up, with the process withering rather than unfolding as the opening itself closed.

The government's prevarication in its Kurdish opening speaks of a complex combination of motivations on part of the AKP. With a strong base in the Kurdish and Southeastern electorate, it clearly is open and sensitive to Kurdish claims and grievances. Also, one might suggest that the AKP is, or at least has been, a natural ally for Kurdish aspirations, insofar as Kurds and Islamists have both been defined as the Other of the Republican hegemony of Turkish secularism, as extra-state to Kemalist statism, and denied political space in the narrative of modernity—Kurds due to their so-called “backward” culture and feudalistic tribal organization, Islamists due to their assumed pre-scientific religiosity and pre-nationalist social organization.

The prime objective of the AKP government in the Kurdish part of its democratic initiative, therefore, may be understood as aiming to combat the PKK at the ideological level. This is a battle for “hearts and minds” and, indeed, for “souls.” The AKP has a “natural” constituency in the Southeast—as earlier elections in particular have shown⁴¹—and does not want to lose this to the Kurdish movement which, by its very foregrounding of ethnicity, denies the primacy of Islam. References from leading government figures to “our Kurdish brothers” (*Kürt kardeşlerimiz*) typifies the AKP refashioning of an old discourse to frame this matter—that is, invoking the religious claim to unity, but with the modern slant of a stated ethnicity.⁴²

⁴¹ Such as the AKP's success in the 2002 parliamentary elections and the 2004 municipal elections, as well as the electoral success of the AKP's predecessor, the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) in the Southeast in the 1990s.

⁴² The PKK, it might be noted, has also reached out to Islam in the past, with attempts to incorporate more religious-inspired figures into its movement and with Öcalan's writings that sought to appease the more pious Kurdish constituents in face of the regional electoral competition with the AKP's predecessor, the *Refah Partisi*.

Notwithstanding these considerations, however, the determining *realpolitik* of the system within which the AKP operates has the ballot box as its ultimate sanction. This is revealed by the government's failure to address the national electoral threshold (by lowering it from 10 percent to the European norm of 3-5 percent). The omission of this from the proposed constitutional changes thus condemns the AKP to the straight-forward charge of political self-interest. They do not want to risk their parliamentary majority, which would be the likely result of the lowering of the 10-percent threshold. This would triple the number of BDP MPs in Turkey's General Assembly to 60.

Recognizing that there is "a Kurdish issue" and promising to change some of the conditions that have given rise to it has been an enormous step forward for the country. The AKP initiative, however, has represented an attempt to define this issue on its own terms and thus set its own agenda for a solution, primarily not by following the religious line, but actually very much like previous Turkish governments did in the 1990s.⁴³ The official AKP position, as declared by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, acknowledges the Kurds as a distinct ethnicity, but harbors this under the roof of Turkishness. The dual identity concept, an overriding Turkish identity (*üst kimlik*) common to all by virtue of being citizens, and a sub-identity (*alt kimlik*) defined by, for example, ethnicity manifestly does assume the nationalist narrative. It is clearly a reconceptualization of the republican concept of citizenship, supposedly devoid of ethnic reference, that operates as an umbrella for the ethnic diversity of the country.⁴⁴ The dominant AKP view, in fact, ultimately assumes a statist discourse, just like the other main parties—that is, as a *sine qua non* of Turkish politics.⁴⁵

See Burhanettin Duran, 'Approaching the Kurdish Question via *Adil düzen*: An Islamist Formula of the Welfare Party for Ethnic Coexistence', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18 (1998): 111-126.

⁴³ See Ersel Aydınli, 'Decoding Turkey's Struggle with the PKK'

⁴⁴ For a defense of this concept by academics in Turkey, see Metin Heper, *The State and the Kurds in Turkey. The question of assimilation* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a problematization of the concept, see Baskın Oran and Ibrahim Kaboğlu's *Minority Report*, which gave rise to their prosecution under

AKP Versus the Kurdish Movement

The Kurdish initiative has been undertaken with a conscious disregard of the social and political presence of the Kurdish movement. It is true that the government faces fierce opposition to the idea of negotiation with the PKK, the “code” of staying in power, which has meant avoiding conflict with the secular bloc led by the military and the judiciary.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, these considerations are, in our opinion, not sufficient to explain the AKP’s approach to the Kurdish question. The party has become so dominant in Turkish politics, occupying the vast center ground of moderate religious conservatism and commanding such a large parliamentary majority, that it not only had the power to instigate an initiative addressing the issue in the Southeast, but also had to go to quite radical lengths to solve it. We believe that there are other reasons why the government has lacked incentive, which thus provide a fuller explanation of the current approach.

There has never been a cooperative relationship between the ruling party and the Kurdish movement, irrespective of calls both in Turkey and from the EU for the two to join forces in order to advance political change in the country. The reasons for the ongoing distrust are various. Of course, the AKP, with many Turkish nationalists among its ranks, has difficulties in coming to terms with the Kurdish issue. But on more than one front the AKP and the Kurdish movement are also direct competitors. Most obviously, in the Southeast as well as in the western metropolises where many Kurds live, they both have sought to obtain the votes of the same electorate over the last decade. They have also employed fairly similar

articles 216 and 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, on charges of insulting “Turkishness.” <http://baskinoran.com/makale/Minorityreportaffair-RegentJournal.pdf>

⁴⁵ See, for example, the analysis of Yael Navaro-Yashin of these and related issues in *Faces of the State*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ Ümit Cizre, ‘The Emergence of the ‘Government’s Perspective’ on the Kurdish issue’, *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 1-12.

means to achieve this, such as the emphasis on local service provisions, and the establishment of relationships between politicized civil society associations and party-friendly entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and the constituents on the other.

Interestingly, both the AKP and the PKK claim to be the architects of Turkish democratization and consequently determining the future resolution of the Kurdish question: the AKP from Ankara through the Kurdish initiative, the PKK from the Southeast through the democratic triangle concept. Neither one would happily tolerate the other's claim to credit or usurpation of authority in democratic improvements. Undoubtedly this constitutes an obstacle for any kind of negotiations between these political actors. Although having pushed for reforms, the way in which the AKP framed these reforms is complicating its own capability of transforming Turkey's political system. Indeed, the AKP government's signature is a series of reforms. As a result of these reforms, Turkey sufficiently met the Copenhagen Criteria and accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU, which had been started in 2005. However, facing severe opposition from the radical secular and nationalist camp, the AKP defended these reforms mainly in reference to a desired integration of the country into the EU. Moreover, the AKP presented itself as the party protecting democracy, and not necessarily as the party transforming the political system in the direction of a liberal democracy. In other words, the AKP framed its policies in a technocratic way: defending them with reference to the European Union, and not based on a deepening of the awareness that the political system in Turkey truly needed radical reforms. This is what Çınar calls the "anti-political agenda of political reform" of the AKP, as a result of which the party is not able to "pursue consistently a reformist agenda" (Çınar 2011: 13, 22).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Menderes Çınar 'Turkey's Present *ancien régime* and the Justice and Development Party', in *Nationalisms and politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*, edited by Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, 13-27. (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Crucially important as this struggle for authority between the political actors is in terms of practical politics, even more fundamental is the difference in *how* the two sides wish to achieve political change. Both the Kurdish movement and the conservative democrats of the AKP seek to transform socio-political life by engaging in the transformation of the individual and society. A better society is sought through change at several levels, including the most intimate level of the lives of their supporters. However, whereas AKP supporters are called upon to meet their individual responsibilities as devout Muslims displaying piety, the PKK ultimately seeks change through the personal transformation of its followers into “new men” or “new women”—that is, men and women dedicated to the PKK’s “revolution” for liberty and socialism, for whom following the PKK’s ideology is considered the means to free themselves from their subordinate position.⁴⁸

“Born from the left,” the Kurdish movement has conceived of itself from the outset as a modern and revolutionary force for change, intent on doing away with traditional structures of socio-political organization.⁴⁹ The conservative AKP constitutes a threat to this transformational project. This goes to the heart of the very real gulf that exists between the competing forces, beyond differences of emphasis or orientation, or the power politics of a turf war. Very much like the secularist opposition of the CHP to the current trend in Turkey’s social and political life, the Kurdish movement as a whole is deeply suspicious of and opposed to the basic direction of cultural change in the country, and the socio-political direction in which the government is going.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed account, see Olivier Grojean, ‘La production de l’Homme nouveau au sein du PKK’. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Thematic Issue n°8 ‘Surveiller, normaliser, réprimer’, 2008. URL : <http://ejts.revues.org/index2753.html>

⁴⁹ Joost Jongerden & Ahmet H. Akkaya, ‘Born from the Left. The making of the PKK’, in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue* ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

Containment Through Counter-Terrorism

The state institutions, still dominated by hard-line Kemalists—such as public prosecutors, the military, and the higher echelons of civilian bureaucracy—continue to perceive the problem primarily in terms of “terrorism” and respond by means of “hard politics.”⁵⁰ Repressive measures such as party and association bans and arrests continue to be employed in response to what is still regarded as an existential threat to the republic. Just as PKK bases are attacked from the air and the ground, so are sympathetic and related organizations hampered, restricted, and closed down. This response is essentially an extension of the “oxymoron of a military solution.”⁵¹ There is a clear continuation here of the establishment’s earlier positioning *vis-à-vis* the political struggle of the Kurdish movement, which relates to the “national security syndrome” embedded in the Turkish political system. This leaves the political elite conceiving of itself as both guarantor of the country’s national security and promoter of liberalization, consequently leading it to undermine democracy in the name of security.⁵²

According to the simple imperative of fighting terrorism, it is in the interest of all the branches and bodies of the state to undermine the strength of the local Kurdish-party-led municipalities. This has been visible not only in high-profile judicial decisions, such as the DTP ban, but also in local ones, such as the Diyarbakır court decision to ban one of the main associations lending support to the poor in the city. This DTP-related poverty-alleviation association (*Sarmaşık Derneği*) was closed down for failing to have the official status of an association working for the benefit of public welfare, a decision that affected some 15,000 of Diyarbakır’s most needy citizens. This kind of law enforcement does indeed attest efforts on

⁵⁰ Ersel Aydın, ‘Decoding Turkey’s Struggle with the PKK’.

⁵¹ Cizre, ‘The Emergence of the ‘Government’s Perspective’ on the Kurdish issue’.

⁵² See also Ümit Sakallıoğlu-Cizre, ‘Demythologizing the national security concept: the case of Turkey’, *Middle East Journal*, (2003), 57 (2).

the part of state officials to undermine the functioning of the Kurdish-party-run municipalities, especially given the importance of aid programs for the ruling political actors to win over the local population.⁵³

In respect of the recent arrests, the security analysis has the KCK depicted as a modernized urban expression of terrorism, clandestinely spreading fear through the region's local authorities, hospitals, universities, and the like. The arrests have generally been portrayed as necessary in the struggle against PKK "terrorism,"⁵⁴ a policy sustained by the governing party, the opposition parties, and the military and judiciary. The main concern is to take away the "root causes" of terrorism, but the current containment politics also attest to the growing recognition that the PKK insurgency cannot be ended by mere military operations. Rather than risking the lives of more Turkish soldiers in the mountainous hinterlands, the aim is to roll back the PKK presence in social and political, primarily urban life. However, the question is at what price? Efforts to contain the Kurdish movement might ultimately lead to a backlash in violence and might have already undermined the Kurdish initiative. This can be read from the many criticisms and outward hostility that the containment approach has already met with from Kurdish social and political actors, as well as from others in Turkey. Most recently, it has merely provided a platform for the linguistic demands of the Kurdish movement, with the defendants in the KCK case claiming the right to use Kurdish in their trial.

Responses

⁵³ The AKP in Tunceli notoriously gave away free refrigerators and stoves in the 2009 election—and won the province. For a more detailed account, see also Kerem Öktem, 'The patronising embrace: Turkey's new Kurdish strategy', *Occasional Paper*, Stiftung Forschungsstelle Schweiz-Türkei and Kerem Öktem, Basel, February 2008.

⁵⁴ See, for example, İhsan Bal. 'The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP.' *USAK articles-analyses (online)*, May 7, 2009. Accessed March, 24, 2010. <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=964>

What the government has designated as counter-terrorism operations has figured in the Kurdish imagination just as anti-Kurdish operations. Images of handcuffed mayors have become iconic in the Kurdish media, triggering indignation and outrage from the DTP and PKK supporters and other Kurdish actors. The closure of the DTP and the December arrests have quickly been seized on by both the PKK and the DTP/BDP to mobilize the masses and increase support. The current repression is depicted as caused by the AKP government. Supporters of the Kurdish movement share a deepening sense of hostility towards the ruling party and have come to denounce the Kurdish opening (*Kürt açılımı*) as a Kurd-less opening or an opening without Kurds (*Kürtsüz açılım*). Less radical voices merely state their loss of enthusiasm, disappointment, and lack of hope for anything to transpire from the government's initiative at this point.

The closure of the DTP in particular deeply dismayed many in the country. Even Prime Minister Erdoğan was moved to speak out against it. For their part, the PKK and the political party and organizations associated with it have responded to the government and state attempts to contain their presence in different ways. In response to the AKP, the PKK leadership first pushed forward its own roadmap in an effort to set the conditions for peace and to position itself as a principal actor in the solution process. The physical copy of this has never seen the light of day, after being “lost” in the corridors of power around the time when the AKP launched its Kurdish opening. The next PKK move was to send a group of peace negotiators from Northern Iraq to act as go-betweens, presumably with a level of collusion from government agencies, a move that offered high hopes for a few days before failing. The PKK roadmap has been neglected since that episode.

In response to the judiciary's operations against its organizational bodies, the PKK leadership in the mountains has continued to call on young people to join the ranks of the guerilla in order to prepare in case of future military operations, and in an attempt to

demonstrate to the Turkish state and military that it is still capable of doing so. The PKK retains the threat of renewed violence, should progress continue to be thwarted.⁵⁵ As for the PKK, its holding on to arms is generally conceived as a means to secure its political survival as well as that of the political struggle with which it is engaged through the KCK and the DTP/BDP. The PKK has, over the past years, never ceased to recruit new Kurdish youth into its ranks,⁵⁶ displaying an ongoing distrust towards the Turkish state apparatus and government of the day. The official position maintained by the PKK—namely, a unilateral ceasefire with the right to “self-defense” in case of attack—becomes more appealing to young Kurds with the crackdown on the legal wing of the movement.

Future Prospects

Given the deep, established fault lines between the Kurdish movement and the AKP, the future promises ongoing political-ideological struggles that are constitutive also of the ongoing identity-formation of the followers and converts of the two movements. This “battlefield” could remain an ideological and thus non-violent one of political strife and conflict, fought within the legitimate arenas of civil society. And it still contains potential for a solution as the AKP grows in confidence regarding its own position *vis-à-vis* the military. Indeed, following the confirmation of the Kurdish party’s electoral power with the constitutional referendum—and repeated statements throughout from Prime Minister Erdoğan and others that the Kurdish problem remains high on the government agenda, even when it appears otherwise—the process has once more shown some small signs of life.⁵⁷ Equally, there is plenty of room for radicalization, should the divide between the two sides widen and

⁵⁵ The PKK ended its unilateral ceasefire on 1 March 2011.

⁵⁶ Güneş M. Tezcür, ‘When democratization radicalizes’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 47 (2010): 775-789.

⁵⁷ For instance, President Abdullah Gül made his second visit to Diyarbakır (the main Kurdish city of the Southeast and considered the “unofficial” capital of the Kurdish movement) as president at the end of 2010, meeting with Osman Baydemir, the BDP city mayor.

become increasingly mutually exclusive,⁵⁸ especially if the AKP fails to take the lead and embark on the radical route forward that will be necessary to finally bring the PKK down from the mountains and achieve real peace.

The ongoing counter-terrorism operations of the state, on the other hand, are far more dangerous since they reinforce those voices within the Kurdish movement that would rather fight their way out of the ongoing repression against their movement, having lost hope for a political solution and believing that a solution can only be found by means of armed struggle. This would mean a rise in armed clashes, possibly leading to a renewed period of warfare between PKK insurgents and the Turkish Armed Forces, giving rise to increased Turkish and Kurdish nationalism and even raising the specter of communal violence between Turks and Kurds in the country's largest cities, which host large numbers of Kurdish migrants and internally displaced people. Failure of the government's initiative will only profit the security forces looking for a *modus operandi* with which to reassert authority in the country. The AKP has brought this danger on itself insofar as it has sought to embrace the Kurds and the multi-cultural reality of the country, while disregarding the societal and political presence of the Kurdish movement.

⁵⁸ In this context, one recalls former DTP co-chair Emine Ayna's statement before the 2009 election, that "those who vote for the AKP cannot be Kurds."

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